

The River of G O D.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at the FUNERAL
OF
Mrs. *MARHTA HORTON*,
Wife of Mr. *WILLIAM HORTON*,
Of SOUTHHOLD, LONG-ISLAND,
December 18, 1792 :

And published at the desire of many of her Friends.

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IN answer to the Request of our deceased Friend, I now appear in this sacred Desk, to offer something from a Text she selected for this solemn Occasion. Her Choice was evidently dictated by an ardent Desire that the Living might be profited by her Death, in all its Appendages. The Text is

REVEL. XXII. 1.

And he shewed me a pure River of Water of Life, clear as Crystal, proceeding out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb.

WE often find in these sacred Oracles the blessings of the Gospel set forth under the Metaphor of a River. So *David*—There is a River, the streams whereof make glad the City of God. So *Ezekiel*—He saw in vision a River that issued out from under the threshold of the Sanctuary, and descended down to the dead sea, whereby its waters were healed; but the mirey places that could not be healed, were cursed of God.—This is the Gospel—a River, deeper and deeper in Mysteries of Grace, till Angels can't fathom it. It took its rise at Jerusalem, from the Temple, (where our blessed Saviour preached), and flows among the nations, whereby many, of being dead in sins, are made alive to God; while others, by rejecting it, bring on them swift destruction.

But the description of this river, that John saw, is still more sublime. He saith,—*The angel shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb.*

How full—how ample—how copious this Metaphor to express all the blessings of Christ's mediatorial kingdom, derived to his people in this, and in the upper world of glory.

Some suppose this River represents the Spirit of God applying these benefits ;—but doubtless it represents both. Here we may notice the following particulars :—The metaphor Water ;—the quantity of it ;—the quality of it ;—the source and head of it ;—the blessed effects of it ; and the glorious invitation in the 17th v. to all perishing sinners to come and partake most freely of it. But,

I. Of the metaphor Water.—Water is refreshing. *As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country ;—so is the glorious gospel good news from Heaven to perishing sinners that feel their Needs.*—Water is an emblem of the Spirit—Says God, *I will send rain upon the thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.*—Says Christ, *W^osoe^{ver} shall drink of the water I shall give him, it shall be in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life.* Hence it is used in Baptism as a sign of the Holy Ghost, in his renewing, sanctifying and comforting influences.

II. We may notice the quantity of this water. Not a cistern that must be fed with supplies ; nor a brook or a rivulet that can be exhaled by the sun in a drought. But a river, always flowing, overflowing and never failing ; because fed by the inexhaustible fountain of divine grace and goodness, that is boundless as the Godhead Himself. This is a river at which thousands and thousands have drank ; and ten thousand times ten thousand more may drink for eternal ages, and it will not be diminished.—Why then, sinners, will you perish eternally !

III. Of the quality. It is superior to the waters of Bethlehem that David longed for. It is pure. Worldly streams are muddy. This is clear. No crystal so clear and transparent as this river. Not the least brack or stain ever polluted it.—It is life giving : *water of life.* Men may drink of other streams and die : but he that drinketh of this shall live forever. Though he die a natural death, yet this will be his passport into eternal glory.—Here are blessings in rich abundance!—Pardon, peace, and life eternal!—Gladness for them that weep—

joy for them that mourn—consolation for the bereft!—yea eternal, consummate glory in heaven for the heirs of hell!—and the Holy Spirit to apply all these blessings to the contrite. This is the river of water of life.

IV. But where is the source of it? I answer;

The throne of God and the Lamb. It heads in the eternal covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son. There is its source and fountain head. When the Godhead from eternity foresaw the apostacy of man; the Father proposed the work of redemption to the Son—promised him a numerous seed—that he should see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.—The Son acquiesced, saying, *Lo I come, &c.*—Accordingly soon after the fall the promise of the Messiah was made;—In the fulness of time he came into the world; assumed human nature in union with the divine; obeyed the law; suffered the penalty; arose from the dead; ascended into glory; is enthroned at the right hand of the Father; where he interceeds for his people; and is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance and remission of sins. In consequence of which the offers of pardon and salvation are now most fully and freely made to us in the gospel.

Now if streams partake of the nature of their sources, much more this river;—it flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It has been flowing for ages;—tho' the patriarchal and jewish age, it flowed in the channel of promises, types and shadows; but now in the pure channel of the gospel, God's word, ordinances, providences; and conveyed by the gracious influences of the divine Spirit.

V. But what are the salutary effects of this river of water of life, clear as crystal from the throne of God and of the Lamb?—I answer, They that drink of it are trees by their water-courses, that flourish in immortal green.—*Their leaf shall not wither, and rebatsoever they do shall prosper.* v. 2. *For on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bear twelve manner of fruits, and yieldeth her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

In the Adamic paradise was a tree of life: that was

a sacramental pledge of eternal life in case Adam had persevered. In the heavenly paradise, we read of the tree of life ;— *To him that overcometh, saith Christ, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which standeth in the midst of the paradise of God.*— But this must mean heaven's joy in the pledges of God's eternal love and complacency.— But these trees, correspondent with those by the river in Ezekiel's vision, are the saints : they bring forth twelve manner of fruits in the graces of the Spirit, and christian duties. They yield their fruit every month ; that is, they, while here, are fruitful in the winter blights of adversity, as well as in the summer shines of prosperity ; and often much more so.— The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations : that is, the good conversation and examples of the godly tend greatly for the conversion of others around them.

Thus I have spoken of this river—of the nature, origin and blessed effects of it— that it contains pardon, peace, justification, adoption, sanctification, the foretastes of God's love, a right and title to eternal glory ; in short all blessings that can happyfy both soul and body in time and through all eternity. But

VI. Is there such a river ?— Who shall drink of it ? Answer. Whosoever will. v. 17. *The Spirit and the Bride say, Come ; and let him that beareth say, Come ; and let him that is a-thirst come ; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

How expanded with wonder, grace and glory is this ! that here, in the close of divine revelation should be inserted the most full, free and ample invitation, to come to this river of water of life, to partake of all gospel blessings, that we have in the whole book of God !— That if any had stood it out till now, one more effort should be made by the Redeemer.— Here all invite. God the Father of Eternity invites the sinner ; declaring he can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Christ.— Christ invites, saying, Come unto me all ye that labour.— Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.— Behold I stand at the door and knock, &c. The Holy Spirit invites by the word and by his gentle influences.—

The bride, the Lamb's wife invites ; it is the desire of the church of God that sinners would come and participate with them in those rivers of pleasure that flow at God's right hand.—Ministers by office invite. God says to them, Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. And says Paul, Now then we are Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

But who are invited ?—I answer, All sinners, the chief of sinners ; them that thirst ; and all, without exception, are invited to come and drink full draughts at this pure crystal stream that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

But upon what terms ?—Most freely ; without money and without price : without any recommendatory qualities of their own : to come as criminals, justly condemned, and accept of pardon and salvation in Christ, as a free gift ; and live devoted to the service of the Redeemer ; forsaking sin, and cleaving unto the Lord.

May God mercifully pour out his Spirit, and give us all this willingness in the day of his power,—this thirst, that we may so come and drink now—that the Lamb may lead us to the fountains of living water in the world of glory above !

I M P R O V E M E N T.

Let us adore and praise God for these rich, boundless, and glorious supplies of his grace in Jesus Christ ; that we live where this river of water of life is flowing all-around us. Now sinners, arise ; thirsty sinners, arise and drink, and live eternal ages blest'd !—Will you die eternally rather than drink ?—God invites you—Christ invites you—the Spirit invites you—ministers invite you—the bride invites you.—What travails of soul, as Paul mentions, have many had for you ! This woman, whose corpse is there lying on the herse, had great concern for you. I was for many days a witness of it. She often expressed an ardent desire that you might be profited by her death. It was most evidently for your sake, and not for her own, that she chose this subject for your enter-

tainment, now at her funeral ; hoping God might set the dispensation and this sermon home to some of your hearts ! — This you may conceive as her dying legacy to you.— Though dead, she yet speaketh. When you shall meet her at the general judgment, she will have a right to demand of you how you profited by her death, and by this sermon ?—But a demand of one, infinitely greater, will swallow up this. Therefore by your needs—by the greatness and rich abundance of those blessings ; and by all these inearing calls, we beseech you in Christ's stead to come. Divine mercy is on the knee to you. God is saying, *Come now and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall become as wool ; though red like crimson, they shall be as snow.* Therefore all things are ready ; come now, come as you are ; if you tarry till you are better, you will never come at all. Here are supplies for all your needs of poverty, wretchedness and misery. Here is sight for you that are blind—hearing for you that are deaf—bread for you that hunger—water of life for you that thirst---white raiment for you that have no covering for your sins---the long white robes of Christ's righteousness, that you may all be clad in priestly garments---and crowns of royalty, that you may wear on your heads. What do you want more ?---Here is pardon for you that are chief of sinners---justification for the condemned---adoption for you that are children of wrath, and have been satan's willing slaves---sanctification for you whose hearts are sepulchres, full of dead men's bones. In a word, here is joy for you that mourn---laughter for you that weep---balm of Gilead for you that are soul sick and wounded---cordials for you that faint---nay, life for you that are dead in trespasses---and heaven for all you whose transgressions have merited hell long ago. Now what say you ? Will you rebel against heaven, and court damnation as if it were a prize of infinite gain ?---Will you rush on the thick bosses of God's buckler ?---Can nothing serve you but to try the awful experiment, what it is to go to hell and be eternally damned ? Hearken to the voice of wisdom in the divine word and providences.

But it is time I say something concerning this our friend

that now sleepeth : not that we can profit the dead, but for the sake of the living.

Mrs. *Martha Horton* was the daughter of Mr. *John Gardiner*, and the late Mrs. *Mary Gardiner* of this town. She was born April 10th A. D. 1759 ; and was married to Mr. *William Horton* in the 28th year of her age ; with whom she lived six years. About two years ago she was a subject of the religious revival in this town : she then first received light and comfort, and has conducted a christian life ever since. About a year and a half ago she joined to this church in full communion, and has walked agreeably. More than a year ago she was taken ill ;—about two months ago she began to be confined--her malady increased till she was exercised with the most racking pains, and her mind with the most distressing doubts and fears, till it pleased God to deliver her from those bonds, when she expressed that abundant joy and consolation in believing, which answered to the greatness of her terrors. The day that I arrived in town, Nov. 28th, I visited her, and found that, though in violent distress of body, she appeared to be in the mount with God.-- For the two first days she manifested to me that she had no anxiety to live or to die; but only that God's will might be done.--Since that time she has steadily manifested a desire to depart and be with Christ ; but almost constantly fearing she should sin by her impatience. I have seen her frequently---every day but one for nineteen days, and often several times in a day. She was greatly exercised with pain, and often with turns most violent.--In the evening of the third instant, in the midst of one of these turns, she desired us to pray for some mitigation : we did ---after this her pains continuing, she desired to sit up : she was placed in an arm rocking chair, and after a little while she broke out in singing this hymn :

On the cold ground, methinks I see
My Jesus kneel and pray for me :

For this I him adore, &c.

Then speaking of the glories of the divine Immanuel and his kingdom, she said, God had given her such raptures of joy and delight as raised her above the sensation of her

pains.---Now again she sang---she spake ;---she sang in such seraphic strains as made us almost think, for a time, we were in the suburbs of glory !

Then she desired me to preach her funeral sermon, from this text, on *the river of water of life* ; which before had been very comforting to her, and which she had desired me to expatiate upon. Then she pointed out for me the funeral psalm, 92d, and sang it :

Sweet is the day of sacred rest, &c.

Then others again joining her as before, she sang that hymn, with those lines :

A few more rolling suns, at most,
Will land me on fair Canaan's coast,
Where I shall sing the songs of grace,
And see my glorious hiding place, &c.

And several other hymns—as that ;

Rise thee, my soul, fly up and run

Through ev'ry heav'nly street, &c.—Dr. Watts.

After this, she desired to lie down. They mov'd her to the bed, and holding her up to take off her loose gown, she said ; O I long, I long to be unclothed, that I may be clothed with the robe, with the long white robe of Christ's righteousness ! O that long white robe, that long white robe of Christ's righteousness ! O what folds ! what folds there are ! then turning to a sister, with whom she had been intimate in religion, she said, Nabby, don't you see it ? don't you see that robe, that beautiful white robe ! ---don't you see them folds ! them folds, Nabby ?--then embracing her in her arms, she said, Arise, Nabby, arise ; I say to you arise, Nabby ; arise and shine ! for the light is come ; and the glory of the Lord is risen.

This, though she was a mere skeleton, she spake with the greatest strength and energy—then she was laid down.

The next morning I found her in a calm frame, and she wished, that if it might be the Lord's will she might depart that day ;—but still fear'd she should sin by her impatience.

In these times I have often heard her speak of that infinite ocean of fulness in Jesus Christ—of her ardent desire that sinners would flow to it ;—that to this end God

would pour out his Spirit—that the saints would arise and shine—and that God would usher in the latter day glory!

To others—extolling the love of Christ, she would say, O what love is this! how astonishing! Lord, my cup runneth over.

Then under desires to depart, I have often heard her use these words; Why tarry his chariot wheels, why are they so long a coming!—E'er I was aware he made my soul like the chariots of Aminidab!—Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, &c.

Once perceiving her pains coming on, she said to her brother, Doct. *Gardiner*, The Lord is bringing on my pains again, and blessed be his name! I thank God for this sickness.

She had a number of favourite hymns she often sang, together with the forenamed: as that,

Far from my thoughts vain world begone,

Let my religious hours alone, &c.

Often repeating them lines in it,

Bless'd Jesus, what delicious fare!

How sweet thine entertainments are!

Never did angels taste above

Redeeming grace, or dying love.

And frequently that hymn,

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood

Stand dress'd in living green, &c.

Once I heard her say, But am I deluded?—I said, Do you love the people of God? She burst a crying, and said, O yes, I know that I love them: I know that I love the people of God.—Christ?—I hope so: and her faith was strong.

She often expres'd her over-flowing gratitude and thankfulness to her friends for their assistance; and if she thought she had been once peevish, in her greatest extremity of pain, she would grieve about it for a long time.

When she saw people weeping, she would often bid them, weep not for her, but for themselves. And to her husband she would apply that passage; Be still, and know that I am God.

At the public Thanksgiving, she charged her family

to make entertainment ; for she said, she never had so much occasion for thanksgiving in her life before ; and often repeated it through the day.

Some times when she seemed unable to speak, she would lie with her eyes open and fix'd, regardless of all who spake to her. Once she lay in such a pause for two hours and a half, and then spake out with a loud strong voice, *Lord, thy will be done.* And then she lay in such a pause again for two hours and a half more.

She often hoped that her death would be of service to some ;—for the awakening of sinners, and quickening of faints.

Her disorder being very rare, and the physicians divided in their opinion, she desired them to open her when dead, for more perfect discovery, and for the relief of the living ; which has accordingly been done.

Thus she laid out, gradually decaying, till the last sabbath evening, the 16th inst. when she told her sister Polly that she was dying ; and then again repeated them lines, which were her last words :

Come, welcome death, the end of fears ;
I am prepar'd to die.

Then beckoning to have them close her eyes, she folded her hands and sweetly fell asleep.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints !—She was no more than what the Lord Jesus, by his power and grace, made her to be. And blessed be that God who, to the confusion of infidelity, is still holding up, in this our dark world, such bright internal evidence of the truth and power of the christian religion !—God mercifully grant we may profit thereby ; and be followers of those, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

ADDRESS to the MOURNERS.

To the bereaved Consort : Sir, we may well condole with you in this loss ; it is a loss to you—*to this church*—*and to the world* ;—But what of this ? the will of the Lord is done ! Now lover and friend and bosom companion, God has taken from you. Remember what the

said to you : *Be still and know that I am God.* May God grant you divine support ! Our friends may die, but Jesus lives.

To her Father : Sir, You have uncommon reason to say with Job,—*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken, and blessed be the name of the Lord.*—As Christ said to Mary, *She shall rise again.*

To her Brothers and Sisters : Thank God that he gave you such a pleasant sister. I remember how you witnessed your love to her, in your close attention night and day. But she is gone. Now witness your love to the Lord Jesus Christ, who made her so lovely.—When stars display their borrow'd light ; we infer the fountain must be luminous. Christ hath taken her, that you might love him the more. Remember her counsels ; and follow her wherein she followed Christ ; that so through grace, you may meet her, with all the redeemed, in yonder world of glory ; there to be for ever happy, in that blissful society, where death cannot enter ; and friends shall part no more.

To all the surviving Relatives :

Despise not this chastening of the Lord, nor faint under his rebuke. Let this serve to quicken you to a diligent preparation, and an actual readiness for your own approaching dissolution. Now is a good time for you to make rich improvements in the divine life.

To this Church and Congregation :

How did she prize the worship and ordinances of God's house ! Improve by these seasons while you enjoy them. Innumerable have gone before you : prepare to follow after.—But, O sinner ! what if this night thy soul should be required of thee ?—Hast thou ever been born again—without which no man shall see the kingdom of God ?—Have you ever seen the worth of time ?—Have you ever seen the evil of our particular sins as against God, so as to be truly soul sick of them ?—Have you ever seen the plague of your own heart, as contrary to God and Christ, so as to feel your need of help from him that raiseth the dead ?—Was

you ever enlightened to see such beauties of holiness in God, in Christ, and divine objects that you cheerfully parted with all for Christ, the pearl of great price ? If not, you are still in the broad way. Death on the pale horse is pursuing you to give the blow, and hell at his heels to catch her prey.

And you my young Friends :— The king of terrors may soon reduce these beautiful forms to putrefaction, and make those sparkling eye-balls roll in death !—Where then is the immortal soul ? To what world is it fled !

A number of you, it is hoped, have chosen the better part. Let your youth blossom in early piety for eternal glory.

But to the secure Sinner :— If you saw your condition, this place would be a vale of tears. Yonder is a dead corpse in a sable coffin ; but are there not among us dead souls carried about in living bodies ? To you the word is, Awake thou that sleepest ; arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. If he that stood at Lazarus's grave, should say to you, Come forth ; then you will hear the voice of the Son of God and live to purpose. Tell him your case ;—pray for mercy till you find your interest in Christ, who is the resurrection and the life.

This,

My Country, is the religion that will soon be the glory of all nations—that will crown the millennium, and illumine all heaven with its beams.—Then teach it your children ; it will make them blessings of society, ornaments of the church, and crowns of your joy !

Parents, be faithful :—if not, their curses may overtake you at the judgment-bar.—Then—O cruel parent, —instrument of my being, and promoter of my ruin !—had you not taught me infidelity, I had been one among yonder shining throng ! But now must plunge deep in endless pain.

Ye Deists and Universalists, Did ever one of your heroes die with equal triumph, under equal trials for so long a time, as this timid woman ?—Once, He

that answered by fire, was God ; by the book you quote. Shall not the religion that answers by triumphs in the flames, on the rack, or a death-bed, be the true ?—Say ye. If our timid women and children excel your heroes, both in purity, in degrees of joy, and in numbers a thousand to one, is it nothing ?—Say ye.—The other font* of argument is open ; when you touch it, we——. Ye sensible gentlemen, read the character—imbibe the grace—practise the duty—enjoy the comfort—possess the honour— and share the glory of a christian !

How many, because they have great fortunes, only float down the stream of time, doing no service for God, men, or themselves, till they are wafted into the boundless ocean of liquid flames ; from whence a gulph bars their return, where a drop of water cannot be had for all their gold.—Then it will be,—Son, remember !—Then, bright, clear, awful recollection will heave all past scenes to view, and harrow their souls with horror forever !

Ye sons of avarice, whose gold is your God, cease your fond grasp for the world, that you may take hold of heaven. Embrace heart piety ; and you will have gold tried in the fire that you may be rich.

Ye profane Swearers, Cursers, Sabbath-breakers, and murderers of precious Time ;—turn unto God by faith in the Redeemer, that you escape everlasting wrath ; and share in those celestial joys of paradise, that flow in rivers at God's right hand.

Lastly, *Ye Saints of the Most High, arise now and shake yourselves from the pollutions of the world :—Look up, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh.—Now is your salvation nearer than when ye believed.—You are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses.—Live as seeing him who is invisible.—Be much in prayer—Be diligent in every duty—that when Christ, who is our life shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory.*

A M E N.

* The Bible.